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Spreng
rifle (Lincoln field)

Brown 299

weapons

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Curios and Relics

Weapons

Guns

Spencer Rifle

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

Opportunity

M A G A Z I N E

333 NORTH MICHIGAN AVE.

CHICAGO

November 20, 1936.

Office of
MANAGING EDITOR

Dr. Louis A. Warren,
Director Lincoln Life Foundation,
Lincoln Life Insurance Company,
Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

Dear Dr. Warren:

We have for use in our February issue an article which purports to be the true story of the introduction of the first repeating rifle to the United States Army.


The story goes on to tell how the inventor after much discouragement in trying to get his invention before the War Department, finally succeeded through the intervention of Abraham Lincoln who actually tried out the gun, shooting at a target on the grounds of the White House.

We are informed that a shingle was used as the target on this occasion and is in existence in one of the Lincoln collections, we believe in a museum in Indianapolis. Can you help us locate this shingle so that we may secure a photograph of it for one of the illustrations?

Whether or not you can help in locating the shingle, we will deeply appreciate any reference you may be able to give bearing on the entire incident. Evidently it is rather obscure and naturally we are anxious that it be fully accurate.

The basis for this story comes from a man down in Pennsylvania who is supplying a photograph of one of the original rifles.

Sincerely yours,


Kenneth C. Smith
Managing Editor

KCS-GP

See letter to G.H. Dahlgren H-336 for Christ presents it

Opportunity

Answer

December 8, 1936

Mr. Kenneth C. Smith; Managing Editor
Opportunity Magazine
333 North Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

My dear Mr. Smith:

A reply to your letter of November 20 has been impossible until this morning, due to the fact that I have just been able to hear from Indianapolis with reference to your inquiry about the shingle target which you thought might be located there.

Mr. Christopher C. Coleman, historical commissioner for Indiana, has had a search made at the State House and in the State Library, but the target cannot be found or any information with reference to it.

We have been able to discover some information about Abraham Lincoln trying out guns at the White House and I expect any of the libraries in Chicago might supply you with a copy of "Inside the White House in War Time" by Stoddard.

Opposite page 43 you will see a very interesting wood cut showing Lincoln with gun in hand as he is about to be corrected by some of the members of the guard for firing a gun within the city limits of Washington.

A fuller account of the incident is given in Stoddard's book "Abraham Lincoln, The Man and The President," where on page 272 you may find this paragraph: "Mr. Lincoln patiently examined whatever was brought to him. He took an especial interest in improved rifles. He at once accepted the idea which the old Army men rejected, that the breech loading rifle was the weapon sure of universal adoption in the near future, and whenever one was shown to him that seemed to promise well he did his best to give it a personal trial. On the wide space of open ground between the White House and the Potomac in the later months of 1861 there stood a huge pile of old lumber. Nobody knew whence or why. It was just a thing upon which to set up a target and there in the very early morning the President of the United States might have been seen accompanied by one of his private secretaries diligently firing away with the last new invention and forming his own opinion of its prospective usefulness."

Mr. Kenneth C. Smith,
Managing Editor

2.

December 8, 1936

If we can help you further in helping to confirm your source material,
we shall be very glad to do so.

Very truly yours,

LAW:EB

Director
Lincoln National Life Foundation



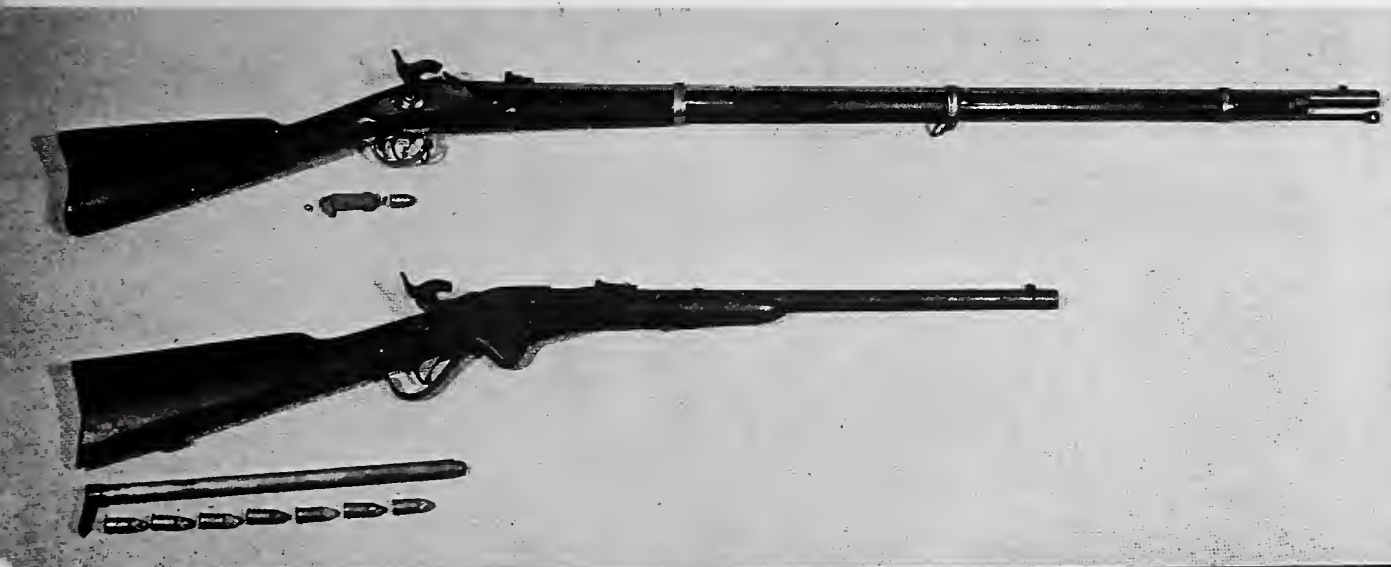
Durable, fast-firing and accurate, the Spencer rifle proved to be the answer to Lincoln's quest for a weapon that would speed the Civil War to an end.

Abe and His "Secret" Weapon

The story of a little-known crisis in American history, involving
President Lincoln and a certain Yankee gunsmith.

By J. O. Buckeridge and Ashley Halsey, Jr.

The revolutionary Spencer repeater was lighter and nearly a foot shorter than the standard old muzzle-loader, and it could be fired seven times as fast.



The corporal, his chevrons new and heavy upon his sleeves, felt his responsibility as only a corporal can. It was just past daybreak in time of war, the year—1862. Somewhere southward there was cannonading and bitter fighting. The corporal, however, could hardly have been in a safer spot. He commanded a sentry post in Washington, D. C., on the weedy expanse of the Mall between the White House and the unfinished Washington Monument. It was, he reflected, a place where nothing could happen.

Suddenly through the morning haze there came the unmistakable bang of a rifle. Then another, and another. A sentry, his young voice shrill with alarm, shouted, "Corporal of the guard!" Together the corporal and the sentry charged toward the sound of firing, heads down and bayoneted muskets at the carry. They saw a figure crouched over a rifle. The rifle was not aimed toward the nearby White House, but, no matter, it was an outrage and a potential threat to the President.

"Stop that firing, you so-and-so!" the corporal roared with a volley of Army oaths. The crouching figure stood erect—a full six-feet-three. The figure was unmistakable, and so was the tall stovepipe hat. The corporal had been about to arrest as a reckless crackpot his Commander-in-Chief, the President of the United States.

Confused and wordless, he and the sentry spun about and retreated as fast as they had come. From the sounds behind them, they knew they were forgiven. Abraham Lincoln's lean frame rocked with laughter. "Well," he joked, "they might have stayed to see the shooting."

Lincoln's use of the heart of official Washington as a target range was not a whim. During the Civil War he personally tested numbers of rifles of various makes and types. Boggled by military bureaucrats, he cut through red tape with a sincere purpose: to find such a good rifle for the United States Army that it would speed the war to an end. As a former frontiersman and militia captain, Lincoln realized the importance of an accurate, quick-firing gun. His quest for the best is continued to this day. As this is written, in the eleventh year of the Atomic Age, an Army Ordnance board is concluding four years of research to select the ideal infantry weapon. The Army's thinking is as fundamental as in the days of Lincoln or Washington: To capture or hold ground, nothing—even in the arsenal of modern scientific warfare—can take the place of the man with the rifle.

In Lincoln's time, the quest was even more urgent, for the rifle was the principal weapon of the Civil War. Artillery was comparatively feeble, and machine guns were in their infancy. Battles were decided by hurling close-ranked masses of men at one another. The side which could shoot fastest at these point-blank targets held a vast advantage. As a result, firearms development was speeded phenomenally during the bloody years 1861–65. At the start, some Confederates were armed only with primitive flintlocks of Revolutionary pattern, operating on a principle three centuries old. By the finish, perhaps a fifth of the Union forces were firing breech-loading cartridge guns which closely resembled modern ones.

The basic weapon on both sides during much of the war was the .58-caliber muzzle-

loading rifle firing a conical Minié bullet. Bullet and powder were encased in paper for quick loading. A percussion cap was used to set off the charge. Shooting was slow work. Three rounds a minute represented rapid fire. A score of experimental breechloaders, using cartridges cased in linen, paper, metal and even rubber, were tried; mostly by the North. All were single-shot weapons except for a Colt six-shooter rifle, an adaptation of the revolver principle using paper cartridges and percussion caps, and two which very nearly approached twentieth-century arms. These were the repeaters invented by Tyler Henry and Christopher Miner Spencer. Both fired metallic rim-fire cartridges, like present-day .22's but larger, by means of lever actions which were forerunners of the modern Winchester's. The Spencer got into the war late, and the Henry almost not at all.

Only through Lincoln's direct intervention did the Spencer reach troops in the field in sufficient quantities to become a real military factor in winning the war. Looking back intimately at weapons rather than at grand strategy, field tactics and military personalities, we can now perceive how much Lincoln contributed through his own experimentation with firearms. In his modest way, he probably would have termed it "tinkering." But he succeeded far better than history has formally recognized.

One of the unnoticed tragedies of the Civil War is the fact that Lincoln did not see the Spencer repeater until the war was half over. If he had, it might have ended the war sooner. In design and operation, the repeater was revolutionary. Much shorter than the long muzzle-loaders, it was approximately the size of the modern Garand, or M-1. Its tubular magazine held seven fat .52-caliber cartridges. These could be fired at the rate of fifteen to twenty-

one a minute, or five to seven times as fast as the muzzle-loaders.

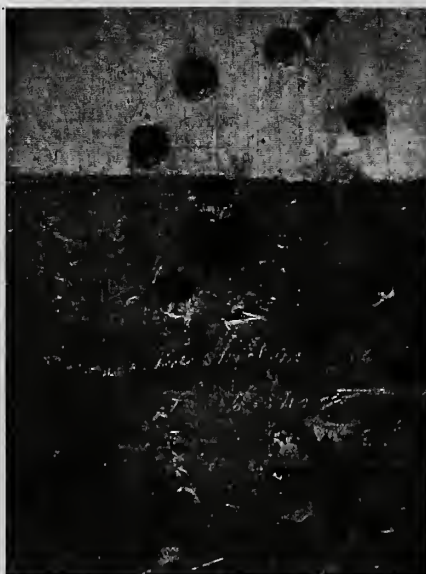
Spencer, the inventor, was a spare, dry-humored young machinist from Manchester, Connecticut. Like Lincoln, he could turn his thoughts and skills to almost anything. He perfected a steam-powered automobile with a crude differential and steering tiller which enabled it to turn corners at a top speed. It hit a milk wagon in Boston in 1862 in what was perhaps the nation's first auto accident.

Spencer experimented with firearms for ten years while he worked as a tool maker, a locomotive repairman for the New York Central, and as a machinist at Hartford for the Cheney silk mills and Colt's

(Continued on Page 96)



Christopher Spencer offered his rifle to the U.S. Army early in the war, but an elderly Ordnance chief dismissed it as "a new-fangled gimcrack."



Target used by Lincoln when he personally tested and approved the Spencer in August of 1863. (Only then was the rifle widely adopted by Union forces.)

Lincoln with Gen. George B. McClellan, who saw an early demonstration of the Spencer, but failed to have his men armed with repeaters.



Abe and His "Secret" Weapon

(Continued from Page 45)

Patent Firearms Company. By March, 1860, he patented his repeater. The principle was strong and simple. The tubular magazine with its seven cartridges was run through the wooden butt of the gun to an opening in the frame connecting the wood and the barrel. The breechblock, a quarter circle of steel with a groove on top, was hinged to the boxlike frame by a screw at its lower front corner. Whenever the block was lowered by the lever attached to it, a heavy coil spring in the magazine pushed a cartridge onto the groove. The groove served as a cartridge carrier, or track. The single motion of raising the lever eased the cartridge into the rear of the barrel and closed the breech. All that remained was to cock the hammer and pull the trigger; no fussing with percussion caps. A flick of the lever opened the breech, ejected the empty and lined up a fresh cartridge.

More than any other single weapon, the fast-shooting Spencer was destined to end the close-order infantry charges which had been warfare's main tactic since the days of the Roman legions. But Christopher Spencer, the young mechanic, could not sell it to "those generals" as he came to call them contemptuously.

Lincoln's generals during the early part of the war were noted mostly for obstinacy, antiquated notions, tonsorial splendor and losing battles. Brig. Gen. James W. Ripley, chief of the Bureau of Ordnance, was in charge of firearms purchases. Ripley, an elderly West Point veteran of the War of 1812 and Mexican War, opposed firearms innovations like a dragon guarding a pass against all comers. He argued that the old smoothbore was as good as the far-shooting rifle; preferred muzzle-loaders to breechloaders as more reliable and less wasteful of ammunition, and is said even to have favored flintlocks over the later percussion locks.

At first, Lincoln, a civilian with a war on his hands, ignored Ripley's crusty obstinacy. Soon, however, he started him on his own experimentation with guns. W. O. Stoddard, of the White House staff, noted in his diary that Lincoln "takes a special interest in the new ideas of breechloaders and repeaters, but the Bureau of Ordnance officials are against him." There came a showdown, which Stoddard recorded.

"Men enough," dogmatic old Ripley told Lincoln, "can be killed with the old smoothbore and the old cartridge, a ball and three buckshot."

"But," Lincoln objected, "our folks are not getting close enough to the enemy to do any good with them. We've got to get guns that carry further."

Spencer meanwhile moved heaven and earth to call attention to the very kind of gun that Lincoln wanted. Ripley, a monolith of military bureaucracy, dismissed the invention as a "newfangled gimcrack."

Oddly, Spencer's first real break came from the Navy. His friendly employer at the silk mills, Charles Cheney, had lived next door to Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles in Hartford. Cheney took young Spencer—and his gun—to see Welles. Spencer demonstrated his repeater at the Washington Navy Yard in May or June of 1861. Twice he fired 250 rounds with startling speed without pausing to clean the barrel. The Navy was delighted. "One of the very best breechloading arms ever seen. . . ." Within weeks, Spencer received an order. But it was for only two repeaters. A week later, however, came an order for 700. Before the end of the war, the Navy bought 10,000.

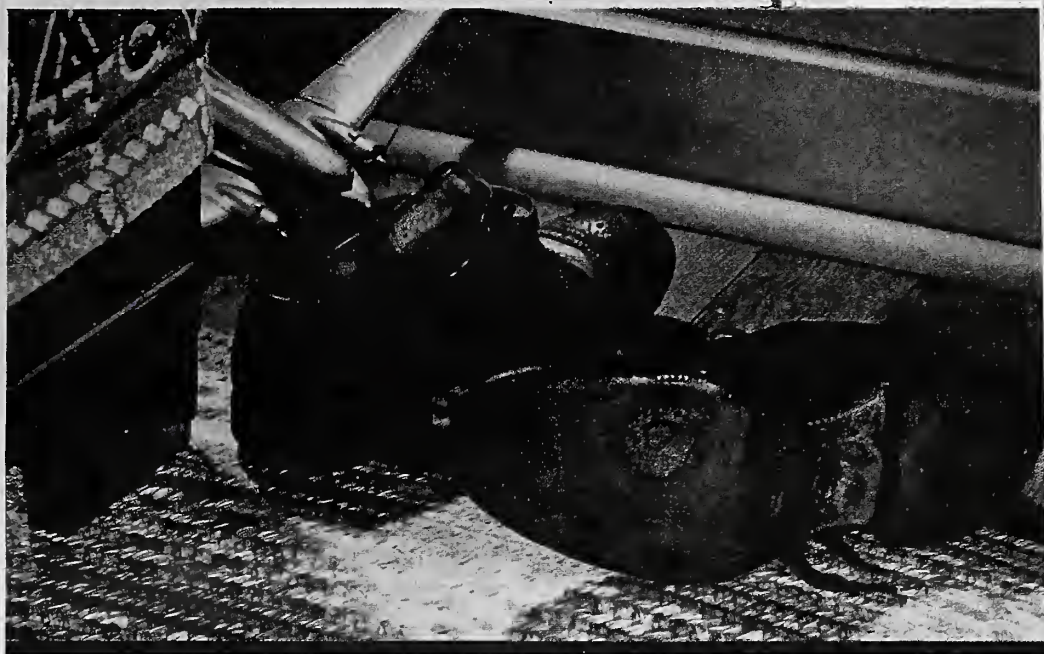
Enthusied at his first orders, Spencer, aided by the Cheney family, formed a company capitalized at \$500,000, then an enormous sum. He leased half of the Chickering piano plant in Boston and set up a firearms assembly line. But he was personally distressed. All his guns were going to the Navy, in small lots for river gunboats and blockaders, when he felt that the Army needed them most.

So, Gen. George B. McClellan, cautious commander of the Army of the Potomac, was persuaded to witness a demonstration of the Spencer and have a board of three officers test it. The board's recommendation in favor of the Spencer went "through channels"—into a Bureau of Ordnance pigeonhole. Men continued to die with muzzle-loaders in their hands for lack of a better weapon.

The obscure little inventor then tried a pitifully small approach. He lent a repeater to a soldier friend, a former Smith and Wesson gunsmith of his own age. It

was a case of one mechanic slipping his product to another for a tryout. The friend, Sgt. Francis O. Lombard, 1st Massachusetts Cavalry, fired the Spencer in a skirmish near Cumberland, Maryland, October 16, 1862, in its first recorded use by the Army. It worked perfectly, he reported. But the Bureau of Ordnance was not moved by a young sergeant's observation.

Spencer's firm resorted to hiring the best Washington lobbyist that money could buy. He quit in six months, frustrated. Spencer then packed his unap-



The shoes . . . the monomer . . . and the



preciated gun and traveled to Grant's Army of the Tennessee, carefully budgeting fifty cents for dinner and a quarter for supper. Grant and his generals recognized the repeater's merits, but doubted that the Bureau of Ordnance, which had armed their troops largely with left-overs, would authorize the expensive wonder gun. Sadly, Spencer went home.

Suddenly he received from the West an unexpected rush order for 2000 repeaters costing, with ammunition, more than \$75,000. It was signed by an Indiana colonel, John Thomas Wilder, a manu-

facturer of hydraulic machinery and a man of original ideas. Upon being elected colonel earlier under a common practice of democracy at war, Wilder armed every soldier with a two-foot hatchet as a handy accessory in camp or battle. Having seen Spencer's demonstration, he was entranced. He summoned his troops to a sort of military "town meeting" and put the question: Did they want Spencer repeaters badly enough to sign personal notes for thirty-five dollars apiece? The answer was a thunderous "Yes!" Wilder, risking financial ruin, endorsed the notes

himself. The order, put through privately, was highly irregular and brilliantly resultful.

In the first big battle test of the repeaters, near Chattanooga, Tennessee, Wilder's "Lightning Brigade" repulsed five times as many Confederates and inflicted triple its own casualties. The solid gray ranks, charging close together as in the past, simply melted into death.

But the Bureau of Ordnance under grizzled old Ripley continued to regard the Spencer as no better than a child's toy popgun.

In what history has proved to be the nick of time, Spencer's trusted friend, Charles Cheney, found a new approach. He shepherded the inventor to another New Englander, James G. Blaine, Speaker of the House and an influential figure who later missed being elected President, in 1884, because of an adherent's inept political statement. Through Blaine, a weird deal was set up. The Navy arranged for 10,000 Spencers to be delivered to the Army without the blessing of the fusty Bureau of Ordnance. The piano-factory assembly line hummed. Some 5000 were delivered in time for the fateful Battle of Gettysburg.

The very site of this decisive battle was determined largely by the firepower of Spencer repeaters. They enabled Gamble's Union cavalry brigade, much outnumbered, to hold off the first Confederate attack for two precious hours. Then Union infantry rushed up, and the battle became general. On the climactic third day, as Pickett charged from the west, Lee sent the Confederate cavalry around to smash the Union rear. They never did.

Knock for Luck

By Richard F. Armknecht

It used to be a fellow could
Find wood when he would
Knock on Wood.
But technological advances
Considerably reduce the
chances
Of finding any wood that's
handy.
I think, therefore, it would
be dandy
To make the formula elastic
Permitting, say, a Knock on
Plastic.

Michigan cavalry, armed with Spencers, stopped them cold.

In Washington the nation's leaders gave up the idea, officially voiced earlier in the war, of disbanding the cavalry as useless. Lincoln, at that time, had been quoted in a grim jest, "Nobody has ever seen a dead cavalryman." The cavalry was then the Union's weakest arm, completely outclassed by the Confederates. Daring sweeps by Confederate horsemen left Lincoln's generals standing stunned as if nailed to the earth. Now, armed with the Spencer breechloader that was far easier to reload on a galloping horse than any muzzle-loader, the Union cavalry was beginning to come into its own.

Spencer, however, was desperate. In two war years his \$500,000 corporation had received orders for some 23,000 repeaters, or less than \$1,000,000 in gross business. With its heavy overhead and payroll, the corporation faced shutdowns or bankruptcy. For a third time, Charles Cheney went to Gideon Welles. Welles, who had been one of the first to approve the Spencer, no doubt knew how it helped to turn the tide at Gettysburg. Now he felt the time had come to urge it upon the President. So he pronounced an open-sesame, "Let us see the President."

Lincoln was ready by then to receive every crackpot inventor who promised to shorten the war. Among the fantastic weapons pressed upon him was a design for a special gun with cross-eyed sights for cross-eyed soldiers. The inventor predicted it would utterly dumfound the enemy: A battalion armed with it would

traveling boy

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KOPPERS CHEMICALS

seem to aim in one direction and fire in another.

Plagued by such notions, the President drew gun books from the Library of Congress to settle his own mind. An English volume on Shotgun and Sporting Rifle, by an author who signed himself "Stonehenge," may have quickened his interest in breechloaders. It devoted a chapter to the subject and dismissed one American breechloader carbine as "little to be relied on."

The President had heard rumors, perhaps distorted in retelling, about the

fabulous feats of the Spencer-armed cavalry at Gettysburg and in the West. He readily agreed to see Spencer.

Spencer's own account of the meeting, taken directly from his manuscript and checked by his three children, all still living, is as follows:

"I arrived at Washington on the morning of August 17th and went direct to the White House. Presenting my credentials, the guard at the door showed me into the President's office. He was alone when I entered and appeared to be expecting me, as without a moment's delay he took the

gun out of my hands, as soon as I removed it from its cloth covering.

"It was the simplicity of the gun that appealed to the President. When he asked me to 'show the inwardness of the thing,' he was greatly impressed that all I needed was a screw driver. With this implement I bared the vitals of the gun and replaced them so that it was ready to shoot in a few minutes.

"President Lincoln then invited me to return at 2 P.M. the next day saying, 'We will go out and see the thing shoot.' When I returned at the time designated I found the President standing with his son, Robert, and an officer from the Navy, named Middleton, on the steps of the White House. As we walked toward the War Department, the President asked his son to go in and invite Secretary of War Stanton to join us and see the shooting.

"While we were waiting for him to return and during a lull in the conversation between Middleton and the President, I mustered up enough courage to ask Mr. Lincoln if it were not a great responsibility to govern such a vast country during the war. Turning toward me with a smile, he said: 'It is a big chore with the kind of help I have.' Also at the same time he noticed that one of the patch pockets on the black alpaca coat that he was wearing was torn, and, taking a pin from his waistcoat, he fastened it up, remarking as he did, 'It seems to me that it does not look quite right for the chief magistrate of this mighty republic to be wearing a torn coat,' and he laughed.

"By this time Robert Lincoln returned and told his father that Secretary Stanton said he was too busy to go with them. 'Well,' said the President, 'they do pretty much as they have a mind to, over there.'

"The four of us walked over to what is now Potomac Park, near where the Washington Monument stands. The naval officer had brought along a smooth pine board, six inches wide and three feet long, for a target, and after making a small smudge at one end for a bull's-eye, it was set up against a tree. I slipped seven cartridges into the rifle and handed it to the President. Pacing off 40 yards, he took his position, but after sighting the rifle a couple of times, he told us to move the target, saying 'It seems to me I discover the carcass of a colored gentleman down yonder, we had better put the target more out of the way.' As soon as he selected a new position, President Lincoln fired his first shot. It was about six inches low. A second one struck the bull's-eye and the other five were close to it.

"Now we will see the inventor try his luck!" remarked the President, as he handed me the rifle. When the naval officer reversed the target, I fired, beating him by a small margin. 'Well,' said President Lincoln, 'you are much younger, have a better eye and steadier nerve.'

"After we returned to the White House the naval officer sawed off the end of the board which the President had used as a target, and handed it to me as a souvenir. Then I presented the rifle to President Lincoln, and he marched into the White House with it over his shoulder."

The day after the President paraded triumphantly home with the Spencer, the inventor was called back for further tests. John Hay, Lincoln's assistant secretary, recorded in his famous diary under date of August 19, 1863:

"This evening and yesterday evening spent with the President in shooting Spencer's new repeating rifle, a wonderful gun, loading with absolutely contemptible simplicity and ease, with seven balls, and firing the whole readily and deliberately in less than half a minute. The President made some pretty good shots. Spencer, the inventor, a quiet little Yankee who

sold himself in relentless slavery for six weary years before it was perfect, did some splendid shooting."

Spencer left Washington elated. Some evenings later, Lincoln took the repeater out on the lawn of the White House for a private test which apparently gave him a pleasurable change from desk duties. A Navy department clerk, working late, saw Lincoln go down a White House hallway, obviously searching for someone. "I was just looking," the President said, "for that man who goes shooting with me sometimes." Not finding him, the President drafted the clerk to assist, and set up a sheet of note paper as a target at 100 feet.

In Carl Sandburg's biography of Lincoln (Abraham Lincoln—The War Years; Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York) the clerk is quoted: "He took quick aim, drove the round of seven shots in quick succession, the bullets striking all around the target and one striking near the center. Then, said Lincoln, 'I believe I can make this gun shoot better,' and he took from his vest pocket a small wooden sight which he had whittled from a pine stick, and adjusted it over the sight of the rifle. He then shot two rounds, and of the fourteen bullets nearly a dozen hit the paper."

Within a month Lincoln banished old General Ripley to New England as inspector of coastal fortifications there, and appointed Brig. Gen. George D. Ramsay as chief of the Bureau of Ordnance.

"Repeating arms are the greatest favorites with the Army," Ramsay reported to the War Department soon afterward. "Could they be supplied in quantities to meet all requirements, I am sure no other arms would be used. . . . Spencer's is at the same time the cheapest, most durable and most efficient of any of these arms."

With Lincoln championing the Spencer, orders for it mounted to more than 200,000. "After the President approved it," Spencer told his children, "we had more orders than we could fill from the War Department as well as the Navy, for the rest of the war." A high percentage were for cavalry carbines. With them, the underdog Union horsemen became consistent victors. The Spencer chewed its opponents in a score of major battles.

"Probably nobody was in better, or sadder, position to testify to the effectiveness of the Spencer than the Confederates. Their Chief of Ordnance, Brig. Gen. Josiah Gorgas, C. S. A., a West Pointer who married an Alabama belle and sided with the South, worked wonders with limited means, but freely admitted: "We were at a disadvantage . . . the celebrated Spencer carbine being generally in the hands of the enemy's cavalry during the last two years of the war."

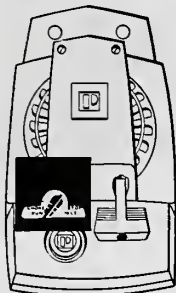
Two curious postwar sequels attest ironically to the worth of the Spencer.

One: There was a second lieutenant, fresh from West Point, who rose to brevet major general in three years through his phenomenal cavalry successes. In almost every notable Civil War victory and in one over the Indians later, his men fired Spencers. Then they were replaced by a single-shot breechloader which the Bureau of Ordnance regarded as ballistically superior despite its slower rate of fire. The general's men, deprived of their Spencers, lost their lives to the Indians. So did the general—George A. Custer.

Two: When Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth, fled into the night, he was heavily armed. He carried two Colt revolvers and two long knives. To fight off Union cavalry patrols, however, he relied most upon a weapon slung over his shoulder with a crude rag sling. He was carrying it when slain. The weapon, now preserved in the Lincoln Museum in Washington, is the same that Lincoln favored—the Spencer repeater.

THE END

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POWER PRODUCTS

CORPORATION

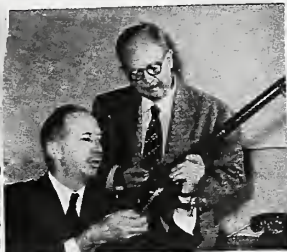
GRAFTON WISCONSIN



Authors Meet With Gun in Hand

Associate Editor Ashley Halsey, Jr., who is coauthoring a piece about how the Spencer carbine influenced the outcome of the Civil War, is a Southerner, but not a Confederate Army veteran. Actually, he once wore a blue uniform ("With mental reservations," says he) as a United States Navy officer in World War II. However, when Halsey was a small boy he used to fire an old Spencer carbine across the Ashley River in Charleston and watch the big .52-caliber bullets rip into a rice mill, which fortunately had been abandoned some time earlier. Halsey grew up, pursuing his yen for collecting and firing vintage weapons, and presently became, among other assets to the Post, what might be termed a firearms editor.

Meanwhile, a Mr. J. O. Buckeridge was operating a one-man advertising agency in Birmingham, Michigan, unbeknownst to Halsey, and vice versa. Incidentally, this may be the world's only such agency that runs on two shifts a day; its boss rises at five A.M., works till noon, sleeps till three, and knocks off at nine. Well, some time ago Buckeridge started,



Gunners Halsey and Buckeridge.

for a client, some routine research on the automatic-screw-making machine invented by Christopher Spencer, and suddenly he got so excited about discovering the historical significance of Spencer's carbine that he spent three years researching that invention for himself. Then he wrote a 150,000-word book on it—Lincoln's Choice, to be published soon by the Stackpole Company—and mailed it to the Post as a long shot for an article condensation. A bull's-eye; it fetched Firearmer Halsey right between the eyes. And that's how the two musketeers arrived on page 44 and got their pictures taken for page 134.

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June 4, 1973

Mr. Mark E. Neely, Jr.
Editor, Lincoln Lore
The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company
Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801

Dear Mr. Neely:

Enclosed you will find articles concerning our most recent accessions of objects associated with Abraham Lincoln complete with photographs which you may find appropriate for inclusion in Lincoln Lore. We are most fortunate in having such an outstanding Lincoln collection here in the Smithsonian Institution and I think the public should be made aware of it. As time permits, I shall try to write up some of the other Lincolniana in the national collections.

With best wishes,

Sincerely yours,



Herbert R. Collins
Associate Curator
Division of Political History

*Original copy and photo filed in
Collections - Smithsonian*

Lincoln rifle (Accession 297603, donor: Elwood L. Middleton)

The second object in the Middleton accession is a Spencer repeating rifle which was used by President Lincoln for target practice during his White House Administration. The accompanying letter explains the rifle in some detail:

"Armory of the Spencer Repeating
Rifle Co
Boston Feby 26th 1864

Chas. H. Middleton, Esq.
Washington, D.C.

Sir:

Your favor of the 2nd came duly to hand and should have received earlier attention but was mislaid.

Far from considering it intrusive we feel much gratified at the interest it evinces in our rifle. We have thought of having some printed directions to accompany our rifles but we had supposed however that most Comdg. officers preferred to give own instructions to their men.

In your postscript you refer to something which you have made for taking your rifle to pieces, but the word is indistinct and we cannot make out what it is as you want us to send the same thing for the President's Rifle will you have the kindness to let us know what it is. What many thanks for your suggestions.

We remain

Very respt yrs

Spencer Repeating Rifle Company
By John H. Willis"



Lincoln rifle (Accession 246404, donor: Robert Lincoln Beckwith)

A second Lincoln rifle which came into the collections of the Smithsonian Institution is a presentation rifle donated January 23, 1963 by Robert Lincoln Beckwith, great grandson of President Lincoln. The rifle and scabbard were presented to President Lincoln by the New Haven Arms Company. A description of the objects follows:

United States Henry Repeating Rifle, 12 shots, lever action Caliber .44 barrel length 24 inches, overall length 43½ inches. Barrel blued metal, walnut stock colored dark brown, with gold plated receiver engraved with a floral pattern and marked on right side "LINCOLN/PRESIDENT/U.S.A." Receiver bolted together through left side. Gold plated butt plate engraved with floral pattern and enclosing 4 piece screw type connecting ram rod of wood and metal. Two piece barrel, octagonal, marked "HENRY'S PATENT. OCT 16, 1860/MANUFACTURED BY THE NEW HAVEN ARMS, CO. NEW HAVEN, CT." on top forward of the receiver with "6" stamped into the top barrel just forward of the receiver. 12 rim fire cartridge magazine under barrel with spring action feed. Scabbard made of web and leather with inside lining, and carrying strap. Leather buckle support marked "20/94/26". Scabbard ripped at lower opening corner and leather fringe pulled away from web. Size 43½ inches in length by 6½ inches at width. Scabbard colored tan. This is one of several highly finished weapons manufactured by the Winchester Arms Company and presented to high government officials in order to promote contracts or so it is believed.



Bull's Eye for President Lincoln

To the Editor:

In the Nov. 14 television review, "The Blue and the Gray" Often Loses Sight of the Civil War," a part of Con-



necticut history was lost. Written off as "never happened" was Lincoln's personal testing near the White House of the new Spencer rifle, with the result that the Government ordered

222,000 such rifles — a great firing advantage to the North, which hastened the war's end.

The episode took place as depicted on the screen, except for the disposal of that particular rifle. Christopher Spencer gave it to Frank Cheney, who had encouraged his experimenting while Spencer was superintendent of the machine shop at the Cheney Mills.

The rifle, still owned by Frank Cheney's great-grandson, Frank Cheney Platt, has been on loan to the Connecticut Historical Society for many years. It is there, too, that I saw the target bearing the inscription, scratched by a nail on the board, "7 consecutive shots made by the President of the United States with a Spencer rifle at the distance of forty yards, August 18, 1863."

The President scored one bull's eye; the other six shots were close. I hope he had a little satisfaction from that demonstration of his frontier marksmanship, but he was probably weighed down by the thought of what those 222,000 rifles would do before the country was reunited.

MARY CHENEY
Farmington, Conn., Nov. 15, 1982

The Spencer Repeating Rifle (Lincoln's Choice)

In March, 1860, Christopher M. Spencer was granted a patent for the first basic repeating rifle that could be fired fifteen times per minute. The dependability of the repeating action was assured by the brass shell. The gun's multiple fire-power brought about the most radical change in warfare since the advent of gunpowder.

On August 17, 1863, President Lincoln examined the Spencer Rifle and used it in target practice in what is now Potomac Park, near where the Washington Monument stands. With seven cartridges in the rifle and standing forty yards from the smooth pine board target, Lincoln fired the first shot which was about six inches low. The second shot struck the bullseye, and the other five were close to it. Lincoln engaged in further target practice with the Spencer Rifle on August 17, 1863, and on several other occasions.

The President insisted that the Ordnance Bureau adopt the Spencer Rifle and he lived long enough to see the repeater in the hands of the reborn U. S. Cavalry. Before the Civil War came to an end some 230,000 Spencer Rifles found their way into the hands of Union troops. It has been stated that the Spencer Rifle was an answer to Lincoln's "four-year prayer".

(This is not the original rifle used by Abraham Lincoln.)

